

February 14, 2016
First Sunday of Lent

THE MOCKERY

Matthew 27:27-31

The scene is The Pavement. It was a broad stone, mosaic floor, between the Fortress of Antonia, Pilate's headquarters, and the Temple. It was large enough for several hundred people. Pilate lived at Antonia when he was in Jerusalem, and, there were barracks for Roman soldiers as well. The Pavement was also a location where the Roman troops might gather to get their orders, to drill, or, to stand for inspection. This was where the Roman Governor would usually pronounce judgment upon criminals, though rarely this early in the morning.

Jesus had been tried through the dark hours of the night by the Chief Priests and the Elders before a hastily-called assembly of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council of Elders in Jerusalem. And it was there that Jesus was convicted of blasphemy. They brought Jesus to this place, The Pavement, to be judged by Pilate. Pilate did not put Jesus on trial. His purpose was only to hand down judgment. And even though Pilate could see through their politically mixed motives, and that Jesus was not really condemnable, he let them have their way, released Barabbas and handed Jesus over to the soldiers whose task it would be to carry out the gruesome punishment of crucifixion.

But... before handing Him over, Pilate had Jesus flogged. Kind of a last ditched effort to wield some control in the situation, and, perhaps, to assuage the Jewish leaders. It seems horrible to imagine that a whipping-post would have been located in such a public place, but it was a Roman place as much as a Jewish place, and any soldier who failed to do his duty, might, likewise, be flogged before a gathering of the troops just to be an example of what might happen when you either disobeyed or failed to fulfill your orders.

Jesus was tied, or, chained to the whipping-post and given 39 lashes that would have flailed the skin off His back, left Him bleeding and in incredible pain, and, for most humans, barely alive.

But Jesus was surrendered. Silent. Even stoic. I believe He probably never even cried out in agony. Though I can't help but imagine that He would wince with every lashing of the whip. Some scholars suggest that there could have been two soldiers flogging Jesus. With two men wielding whips, He wouldn't have any time to catch His breath between blows. The shock of one slap of the cat-of-nine-tails would be followed immediately by another and another until 39 blows were delivered. Thirty-nine because 40 was too many. The victim might die.

After Jesus was flogged, they dragged Him away. The scene changes from the place called The Pavement to the Praetorium – inside the compound of the Governor's headquarters. There, the whole cohort of soldiers was gathered around Jesus. (v. 27) That's when they got really mean. They taunted Jesus. A few soldiers gathered some thorny twigs, twisted them into a crown, and forced it into position on Jesus' head. More blood. More pain. Did the soldier who plaited the thorns together get pricked by them? Did he bleed too? It would seem only natural – he couldn't avoid it.

The whole idea of mocking someone is to reduce them to nothing, to shame them, to dishonor them to the point of complete humiliation. "You say you are the king of the Jews? Here's your royal robe! Here's a scepter for you! And... here's a crown! Wear it.... King! We kneel before you,... king! Hail, king of the Jews!" And they spat on him, took the reed they put in His hand for a scepter and whacked Him on the head with it, forcing the thorns deeper into His scalp. Mocking Him.... To their own shame.

Jesus was surrendered. Silent. I wonder if He looked at His abusers. And if that look sparked any remorse. Sometimes a look of pity from the abused person cuts just as deep. But these men were hardened. They were the crucifiers. Jesus was nothing to them.... Yet!

What they did actually fulfilled prophetic Scripture. Isaiah 53:3-10a – *“He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces... he was despised, and we held Him of no account. Surely He has born our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted Him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the punishment that made us whole, and by His bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet he did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open His mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined His future? For He was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made His grave with the wicked and His tomb with the rich; although He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him with pain...”*

When we think of the agony our Lord endured on our behalf, it should make us grateful. His torture was so severe because my sin is so terrible. Jesus suffered to take away my sin from before the throne of Judgment. Jesus endured the mockery I deserve.

Ever since he began to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, and His sweat became like great drops of blood (Luke 22:44), He was made the vessel into which was poured the stain of my sin and the pain of my guilt; and.... the stain of your sin and the pain of your guilt. We are forgiven by His suffering. We are redeemed by His blood!

Thank you, Jesus!